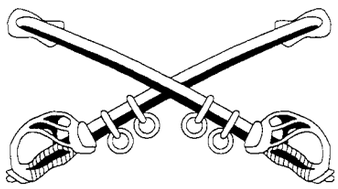
THE CIVIL WAR BATTLE AT

MONROE'S CROSSROADS

Fort Bragg, North Carolina

A Historical Archeological Perspective



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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Throughout history incidents have occurred that have gone unnoticed or received only the most cursory mention in the documentary sources. Often these unheralded incidents are now of interest to researchers attempting to refine our understanding of the significance of historical events. This is the case with the March 10, 1865, Battle of Monroe's Crossroads.

The Civil War, as an epic event, looms large in the history of America, and a huge body of myth has grown around historical truth. With the current popularity of the Civil War, the wide range of print and visual media being generated on the subject often glosses over details of events. To many, the specific event is of interest for a variety of reasons. Yet, too often the details of a small battle, like Monroe's Crossroads, are obscure in the historical documents because the confrontation was not a significant battle or turning point of the war. No researcher interviewed veterans when the battle was still fresh in their memories, nor have masses of archival data survived, again because the battle was not considered significant.

The battle at Monroe's Crossroads (Figure 1), fought on March 10, 1865, interests historians because of the role it played in the march through the Carolinas by General William T. Sherman, U.S.A. (USMA 1840), Commanding, Army of the West. (Names of Confederate combatants and units are italicized in this report). It was a minor battle and a near Federal disaster, but in the taking of Fayetteville and the overall campaign it has become only a footnote to the events played out at Appomattox Courthouse in early April.

The battle is of interest in history because it was a cavalry clash between two flamboyant and highly regarded cavalry officers, *Lieutenant General Wade Hampton,* C.S.A. (SC College 1836), Commanding, Cavalry, *Army of Tennessee* (Figure 2); and Brevet Major General Hugh J. (Judson) Kilpatrick, U.S.A. (USMA 1861), Commanding, 3rd Division, Cavalry Corps, Army of the West (Figure 3). Kilpatrick was totally surprised, almost captured, and nearly lost his command. *Hampton* executed a daring dawn cavalry charge, overran the Federal camp, but failed to capture his objective.

Today the battle site and its history have renewed value and meaning to the XVIII Airborne Corps and 82nd Airborne Division soldiers who use Fort Bragg as a training ground for modern warfare. The historic battle site provides an opportunity for training small unit leaders.

A STAFF RIDE

The Monroe's Crossroads site, in the midst of active training areas of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, provides an outstanding opportunity for development of a small unit situational leadership staff ride.

The staff ride concept was pioneered at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas in the 1890s. By 1906 the first staff ride had taken place at the Chattanooga battlefield, Tennessee. The concept continues to evolve today.

The staff ride concept is meant to expand and supplement FM 100-5, *Operations* (June 1993), by placing personnel, well grounded in the theory of battle, on actual battle sites to study and critique the tactics and strategy of that engagement. The staff ride concept is one that takes the study of war and warfare from the theoretical to the practical by using historical examples set on the actual terrain where the battle occurred. A staff ride, then, is a systematic study of a selected campaign, an extensive visit to the actual campaign sites, and an opportunity to integrate the lessons derived from each experience (Robertson 1987:5).

The staff ride is designed to expose students to the dynamics of battle. It provides case studies in the application of the principles of war, the relationship between technology and doctrine, unit cohesion, and the effects of terrain on operations. The staff ride also provides case studies in leadership at any level

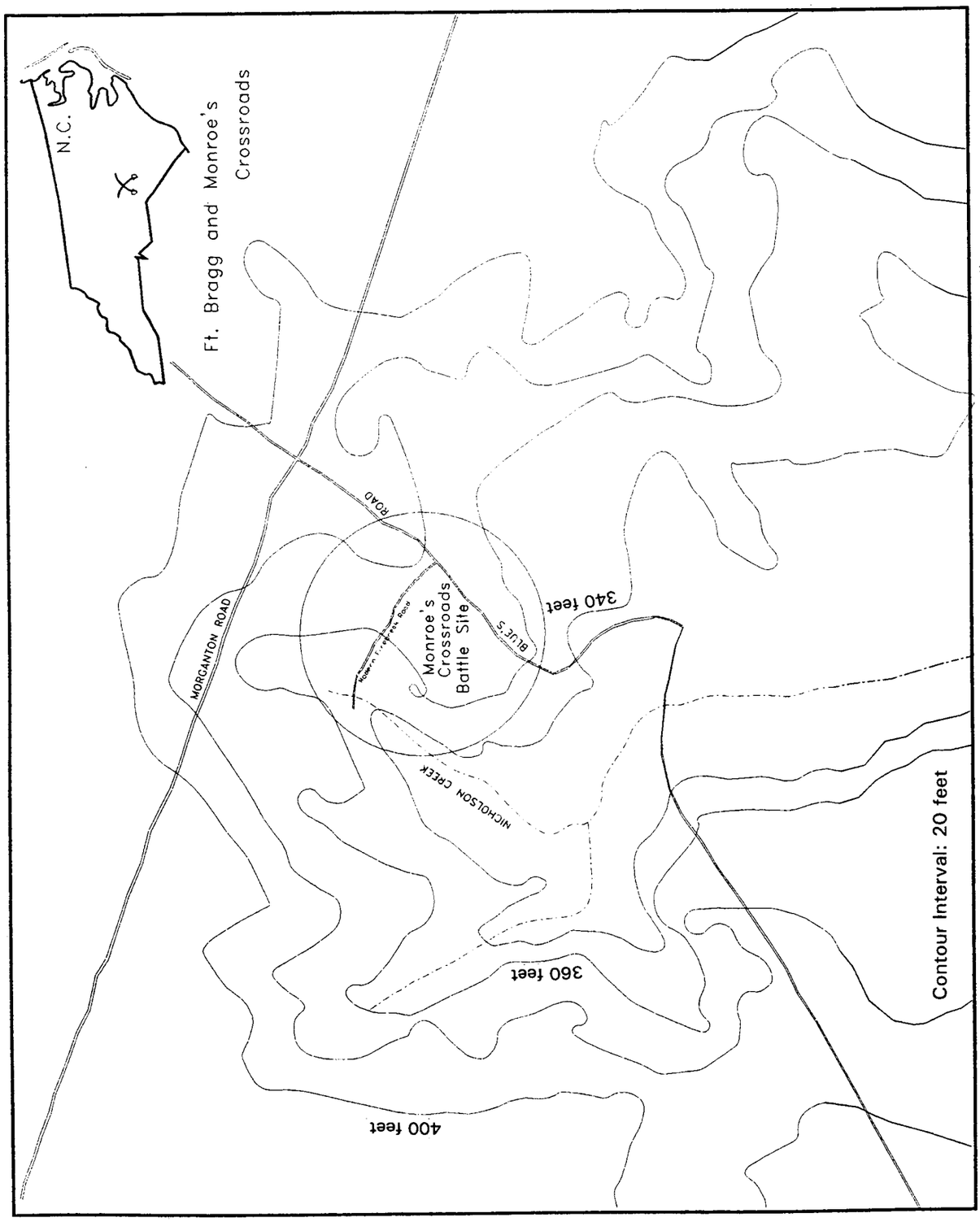

Figure 1 — This map shows the location of the study area within Fort Bragg Military Reservation near Fayetteville, North Carolina.

desired (Robertson 1987:5–6). The Battle of Monroe's Crossroads offers many lessons in tactics and doctrine for today's small unit leaders, non-commissioned officers, and junior officers.

The recorded history of the Monroe's Crossroads battle is good but not exhaustive. The official records provide basic sources on the course of the battle. These are supplemented by several eyewitness

Figure 2 — *Lieutenant General Wade Hampton, C.S.A.*

and participant recollections and the analyses of the accounts and official records by several historians. The site location is well known and retains integrity because it has not been subject to development or extensive modification. The site is reasonably well protected as part of the Fort Bragg military reservation and is readily accessible for on-site visits and field exercises that are not intrusive.

While many details of the battle were known before this study, the precise locations of most of the battle's constituent cultural features (e.g., the Monroe farmhouse and outbuilding), as well as locations of the various elements of the Federal camp (e.g., siting of the fieldgun battery), were unknown. These elements need to be determined and understood to develop an effective staff ride. Over the years, relic collecting and metal detecting have revealed tantalizing clues about the battle with the discovery of bullets, belt buckles, equipment, and cannon projectiles. Bill Kern, recognizing the value of the physical evidence, proposed an archeological inventory and study of the site to gather both interpretive information and data that would assist in the development of a staff ride plan.

With Department of Defense Legacy Resource Management Program monies, the study was implemented through the Technical Assistance and Partnerships Section of the Southeast Archeological Center, National Park Service. The project goals were to assess the historical record, conduct an archeological inventory, and undertake limited block excavations. The objective was to reassess all data sources to build a comprehensive understanding of the battle's events and movements.

A NEW KIND OF STORY

This product of that effort is a new kind of story about the battle at Monroe's Crossroads. It is about history, but it is not a history. The focus is the battle, but the tool of study is historical archeology, a unique science that shares a common goal with history—understanding the past.

If history turns pages, then archeology turns the ground. Historical archeology, as the name implies, does both. Records and documents are essential ingredients in historical archeology but no more so than the knowledge gleaned from artifacts left behind by participants in the event. Thus, historical archeologists weave the strands of history with clues painstakingly sifted from the earth to form a fabric unlike that attainable through history or archeology alone.

The premise is that the modern study of a battlefield requires a combination of historical sources and archeological data. How is this achieved? An analogy may suffice as the answer. In solving a crime, police rely upon two very different types of evidence. Detectives interview witnesses, while other investigators gather fingerprints, blood samples, and other physical evidence. These

investigators address different types of evidence using unique methods. Evaluated together, the results of their partnership enhance the likelihood of solving the crime.

The records and documents that historical archeologists use, especially first-hand accounts of historical events, are tantamount to eyewitness testimony. They provide the material for generating hypotheses that can be tested in the archeological record. They also furnish the basis upon which patterns observed archeologically can be assigned historically meaningful identities. The archeological record contains historical clues in the form of physical remains and their contextual relationships. These relationships, including distributions and spatial associations of various types of artifacts, can reveal a great deal about the activities carried out at a site.

The historical archeologist continually compares both sets of data as work progresses in order eventually to explain better the events under scrutiny. Historical archeology provides important checks and balances between two data sets and allows more complete approaches to the understanding of historical events and the cultural milieu within which they transpired.

A Pattern of Behavior

The basic tenet upon which anthropology and archeology rest is straightforward. Human behavior is patterned. The residue of that behavior should also be patterned and reflect, in varying degrees, details of that behavior. Battlefields represent the most violent expressions of human behavior. The premise is that physical signs of violent behavioral patterns are likely to be evident (Fox and Scott 1991).

Warfare is conducted according to special rules. Within the Euro-American culture, this is evidenced in the preparation and training given members of the military. This training is given, and this was true in 1865, to ensure that those engaged in battle will perform their duties and respond to orders without dwelling on the consequences (Dyer 1985). That is patterned behavior.

The American Civil War pitted two armies from the same culture and essentially trained for combat in the same manner. For all practical purposes, the same doctrine and tactics were used by both the Union and Confederate forces. From a cultural perspective, this is a classic definition of civil war—a single people fighting one another with the opposing forces using similar combat techniques.

Beyond its ability to provide additional details about historical events, historical archeology can "identify specific relationships between certain kinds

Figure 3 — Brevet Major General Hugh J. Kilpatrick, U.S.A.

of behavior under the stress of war and the characteristic material by-products of that behavior in their final [archeological] context of discard" (Gould 1983:134). The means to understanding behavioral relationships in the archeological record is pattern analysis.

Artifacts and Patterns

This archeological tenet argues that artifacts, the remnants of behavioral acts, will occur in patterns that are recognizable and interpretable.

Battlefields provide a unique opportunity to study

the material by-products of human conflict. Gould (1983:105-107) argues that artifacts are signatures of particular kinds of behavior and that behavior can be identified if the relationships between the signatures are studied. Gould (1983:105) makes a significant point that artifacts or physical evidence should be viewed as another form of documentation. Just as the written word or oral testimony can be assessed and analyzed, the meaning of artifacts and their context can be understood and interpreted.

A Deductive Theory

Pattern analysis is as old as professional archeology. Patterns are the way in which artifacts are found in the ground and the relationship an artifact or a group of artifacts has with other items—context and provenience. South (1978) and Lewis (1984) were among the first historical archeologists to develop a clear deductive theoretical perspective based on pattern analysis.

By way of example: A group of square cut nails recovered in association with a structural foundation can provide the archeologist and historic architect an idea of what type of structure once stood on the site. Certain sizes of nails were used by carpenters to erect framing, others for siding, lathing, and finish work. The spatial distribution or clustering of the nails is one element of the pattern.

Another element is the groups of different nails present. That carpenters were trained to use certain nail sizes for specific construction sequences is an example of culturally induced behavior. Analysis of the patterns reveals where the structure was placed, how it was built, and suggests what it may have looked like.

In addition, other artifacts provide clues to the location of doors and windows and even to what type of doors and windows were used. Even more important are the artifacts of daily life. Food refuse, food service, lighting, clothing, and personal items all reveal something of the personal habits of those who inhabited the structure, the structure's function, the social and economic status of the inhabitants, and how they viewed their own roles and importance within their society.

The analysis of the artifacts recovered in an archeological investigation can take many forms. The analysis may be simple inductive reasoning or it can be hypothetical and deductive. The process followed here is the deductive approach based on the development of research questions that guide the recovery of information and the analysis of the data.

STUDY OF MILITARY SITES

There is a plethora of scientific reports detailing the results of investigations at American military sites. These investigations have often been conducted as ancillary studies to the preservation, restoration, reconstruction, or interpretation of some military-related site.

For many years, the study of military patterns has tended to focus on the excavation of the structural evidence of forts (Scott 1989, Carlson 1979, Smith 1972). Some investigators have dealt with artifact patterns and their relationship to site function and past lifeways (Lewis 1980). Recent investigations have focused attention on the definition of patterns. Lees et al. (1983) and Lewis (1984), using South's (1978) frontier pattern, have identified a military site pattern that has a regimented and uniform construction layout. Architectural artifacts dominate the assemblage, with personal artifacts being predominantly male and military oriented.

This pattern is demonstrable in the archeological record, but it focuses on the more stable or permanent military site types. Clearly the military pattern is more complex than this.

The Union and Confederate armies of the Civil War mirror the rest of the society which they represented. The material culture of the armies is that of its society with a few specialized tools that demarcate it from the rest of that society. An army, in effect, becomes a subcultural unit, even more recognizable than most ethnic units. The military, because of its material culture, is an archeologically recognizable unit.

The military is a rigidly structured and stratified sub-cultural unit by its very nature. The military's job is war or war-prevention, and this job requires a rigidly stratified structure to carry out its goals (Dyer 1985). The officers assume the higher authority and status, in effect becoming the various levels of staff and line managers. The enlisted personnel, because they bear the brunt of waiting for or participating in

combat, are lower on the class scale. They are easily equated to working class in the greater society.

This very real and necessary dichotomy provides an excellent point for study. The trappings of the military uniform—from buttons to rank insignia—are indicative of class stratification on all levels of the military. This status differentiation essentially mirrors the whole of Victorian society in a slightly exaggerated form.

The study of military sites, because of the military's structured and ranked nature, provides a well-defined view of the broader Victorian-American society, a way to examine that society's behavioral patterns and cultural expressions of economic and social status. Military sites are easily defined archeologically and are usually relatively compact social, cultural, and physical units, which makes them ideal study sites.

Military sites also have unique aspects related to their function—the prevention or making of war. In that regard, the military site offers a unique perspective on the behavioral aspects of a culture or cultures in conflict.

A battlefield may appear to be a simple type of archeological site. Like any other level of archeological endeavor, the site is always more complex below the surface. Noel Hume (1968) once considered battlefield sites to be poor places for archeological investigations. He considered them good places to find cannon positions and good places to find war relics for museum displays, but not sites worthy of serious archeological investigation.

Recent battlefield archeology at Saratoga (Snow 1981) and at Little Big Horn Battlefield (Scott and Connor 1986; Scott and Fox 1987; Scott et al. 1989) has shed an entirely different light on the subject. A battlefield might be expected to be the least likely place to find archeologically definable behavioral patterns. However, those who engage in combat fight in established manners. They fight in the patterns in which they have been trained (Dyer 1985). It is precisely this training in proper battlefield behavior that results in the deposition of artifacts, which can be recovered by archeological means and interpreted in an anthropological perspective.

Clearly battlefield studies can yield information on combatant positions during the course of the battle. They can also provide details about dress, equipage, and in some cases individual movements.

Archeological investigations can retrieve information on troop deployment, firing positions, fields of fire, and weapon types. Studies of artifact patterning can also reveal unit or individual movement during the battle, weapon trajectory, and range of firing by determining forces of impact. Battlefields viewed in an anthropological context should be seen as the physical and violent expressions of a culture or cultures in conflict.

A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Concern with behavioral dynamics is not new in historical archeology, although battlefield archeology is a relatively new area of study (Fox and Scott 1991). The battlefield model states that individual and unit movements can be reconstructed using pattern recognition techniques. The model also predicts certain types of behavior will be present depending on the culture, training, and organization of the combatant groups.

The ability to translate artifact patterning into behavioral dynamics, particularly through the use of modern firearms identification procedures, constitutes an important contribution in this regard. Accordingly, research into the Monroe's Crossroads battle provides, in addition to new data bearing on the fight, a framework within which the behavioral aspects of many other battles can be studied.

History and Historical Archeology

The accumulation of historical literature pertaining to the Battle of Monroe's Crossroads is not large. To many, the battle is just a footnote in a larger campaign that helped to end America's bloodiest conflict.

Most of the uncertainties in perspectives about the fight stem from limitations in the primary historical record. This primary record consists mostly of eyewitness accounts. There is, unfortunately, a real dearth of testimony available regarding events during the battle. Nevertheless, regardless of the number of accounts, they must be critically examined, and historians have long recognized this.

The Union and Confederate accounts are fairly consistent. However, there are contradictions and

ambiguities in the different participant accounts. The major contribution to ambiguity in the testimony seems to lie in the nature of warfare. Whatever their training or cultural affiliations, individuals rarely witness more than a few incidents in a fight. It is thus difficult to piece together various individual testimonies to form a coherent and complete account of the fight's process.

Inconsistencies among accounts are examples of confusion in the historical record. Contributing to this is the tendency, in some instances, for testimonies to change over time as memories dimmed.

Some accounts were not written down until 40 or more years after the fight. Finally, eyewitnesses, who could not have anticipated the future, generally failed to comment on or were less than specific about details that are of interest today.

Contradictions punctuating the historical record cannot be resolved through studies of the historical record alone. The physical evidence and spatial patterning in the archeological record should help resolve some of these issues.

It is equally recognized that historical archeology does not represent the "last word" in the study of the battle. On the contrary, the work is complementary to history and is a vehicle by which new data can be brought to bear on historical problems. The archeological record is only a new set of data contributing to the study of the battle.

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